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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 THE HAGUE 002836

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NL](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/EU: SWARTBOL ON TURKEY, RUSSIA, CHINA, IRAQ, RUSSIA, AND KROES

REF: A. THE HAGUE 2723

[B.](#) THE HAGUE 2789

[C.](#) THE HAGUE 2766

[D.](#) 10/28 HAGUE-UBI E-MAIL

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CLIFFORD SOBEL, FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: Rob Swartbol, PM Balkenende's senior foreign policy advisor, predicted to Ambassador Sobel on November 1 that the EU will make a positive decision on Turkish accession negotiations in December, but warned that the Turks will find some elements of the decision more objectionable than the Commission's report. On Russia, Swartbol dismissed a Russian threat to lower the level of representation at the November 11 summit, noting that this would have little impact on EU negotiating positions; Russia's continuing unwillingness to engage the EU in Russia's "near abroad," however, is a more serious long-term problem. The EU will probably not lift the China Arms Embargo during the Dutch presidency, according to Swartbol, but the lack of a new commission complicates the EU's ability to offer other deliverables (such as market economy status) at the December 8 EU-China summit. The Dutch are officially committed to pulling out of Al-Muthanna in mid-March, barring unforeseen circumstances, but will participate in NATO and EU missions there and are pushing the EU to play a more active role. The EU will continue to follow the EU-3's lead with regard to Iran, but could support a referral to the UNSC if the Iranians refuse to cooperate. Finally, Swartbol said that the Dutch are fighting hard to retain the European Commission's Competition portfolio for Neelie Kroes but may ultimately relent to maintain EU unity. END SUMMARY.

TURKEY: THE WORST IS YET TO COME

[12.](#) (C) Rob Swartbol, Senior Foreign Policy Advisor to Dutch PM Balkenende, told Ambassador Sobel on November 1 that current Turkish unhappiness with the European Commission's October 6 report is only a precursor of worse to come. Echoing comments made earlier by Dutch POLDIR Hugo Siblesz (ref A), Swartbol asserted that the Commission's report represented the "maximum" the EU could accept with regard to Turkey; the December 17 Council decision would be "narrower" in scope and even more likely to upset the Turks. Ambassador Sobel pressed Swartbol to clarify what elements of the Council decision would be problematic and why. Swartbol responded that the Austrians were insisting that language describing accession negotiations as open-ended actually spell out the possible outcomes, giving accession and non-accession equal weight. (The French, he added, wanted similar assurances, but were being more creative on crafting open-ended language.) Swartbol asserted that setting a date remained a highly contentious issue, but suggested that the EU might be able to finesse the issue by starting the acquis review on one earlier date (such as March, 2005) and beginning "actual negotiations" later. He predicted that the date set to begin negotiations would most likely be in the latter part of 2005, although he did not rule out slipping to early 2006. At the end of the day, he said, the Turks should focus on the positive elements of the decision and not make a fuss over the details needed to generate consensus.

RUSSIA: YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD IS MY BACKYARD

[13.](#) (C) Turning to Russia, Swartbol confirmed that the Russians had threatened to send PM Fradkov to the November 11 summit in The Hague if there was no agreement reached on the "four common spaces." Swartbol dismissed the threat as inconsequential, however, noting that this only highlighted the pointlessness of holding semi-annual EU-Russia summits. The EU intended to stand firm, he said, on refusing to delink the four common spaces (ref D). The biggest problem, he argued, is that the Russians refuse to acknowledge that the EU has a legitimate interest in developments within Russia's "near abroad"; what the EU thinks of as a "common neighborhood" is viewed by Moscow as its exclusive "backyard." (Note: Dutch POLDIR Hugo Siblesz also recently told the Ambassador that the Dutch are increasingly concerned about the negative direction in EU-Russian relations; post will continue to follow closely and will report after the summit.)

CHINA: LIFT, BUT WHEN?

[14.](#) (C) Noting that the French were using "every opportunity"

to press for a lift of the Arms Embargo, Swartbol said he would not be surprised to see the issue reappear on the agendas for the upcoming GAERC and Council meetings. The EU, he said, is in principle agreed on a lift; the only question is "when." Swartbol doubted that a lift would occur during the Dutch presidency, putting the odds at "80-20" against. Echoing recent public statements by FM Bot, however, Swartbol suggested that the EU could make a positive signal regarding a future lift at the December 8 EU-China summit. (Note: Swartbol remarked in confidence that Bot has "flip-flopped" on the China arms embargo and expressed frustration with ministers who hold a strong position "until they go to America and change their minds.") Ambassador Sobel warned that in American eyes, lifting the Embargo during the Dutch EU presidency could create a "defining memory" of the Dutch presidency, and asked whether progress had been made on identifying other deliverables for the summit. Swartbol responded that the EU had prepared a "great package" (which he offered to share with us) but noted that the absence of a new commission complicated the EU's ability to take steps toward granting China market economy status, which he characterized as the "jewel in the crown."

IRAQ: "NO" MEANS "NO" -- UNLESS....

15. (C) Ambassador Sobel noted that the Dutch government would soon send a letter to the parliament (refs C and D) laying out its position on Iraq and asked whether this would prompt debate on a possible Dutch extension in Al-Muthanna. Swartbol responded that the Dutch government's official position on an extension was "no." He did not rule out the possibility of a debate in parliament, but stressed that at the moment only one faction -- the conservative Liberal Party (VVD) supported an extension. All other parties, he said, were opposed, and he did not expect this to change absent a "drastic deterioration" in the situation in Iraq. If the elections were to be delayed, for example, then the Dutch might be prepared to remain a few extra weeks, although he cautioned that "we won't say this openly." The British and Japanese are lobbying hard to keep the Dutch mission in Al-Muthanna, he added, and their concerns (and those of the U.S.) are well understood. In response to Ambassador Sobel's question, Swartbol confirmed that the Dutch planned to maintain a much smaller presence in Iraq through proportional contributions to NATO and EU missions, and stressed that there was no intention to leave Iraq completely. He refused, however, to describe a remaining Dutch presence as "significant." (Note: On November 1, FM Bot reiterated in parliament that the government intended to end the Al-Muthanna deployment in March but did not rule out reconsidering "in the event of unforeseen circumstances" or "if the entire world appeals to us.")

16. (C) Turning to the EU support package for Iraq, Swartbol confirmed that the Council hoped to present a completed package to Allawi on November 5. Without providing details, Swartbol said that the French continued to obstruct agreement on the package, although the Germans, on the other hand, had been "surprisingly helpful." Noting that it was always difficult to get the French to join consensus, Swartbol commented that Allawi had complicated matters further by making himself personally unpopular with the French through his "unhelpful" comments. He complained that the

IRAN: MORE TIME NEEDED

17. (C) Swartbol said the Dutch Presidency would continue to follow the lead of the "big three" and to seek coordination between the EU and the U.S. He expressed appreciation for the "extra time" the U.S. appeared to be giving the EU-3 to work on Tehran. (Ambassador Sobel stressed that this time was quickly running out.) Swartbol anticipated that if the Iranian response to the EU-3 proposals is negative, then the EU might eventually support a referral to the Security Council.

COMMISSION POLITICS: WHITHER NEELIE KROES?

18. (C) Swartbol confirmed that Prime Minister Balkenende has recovered from his recent illness and is fully focused on finishing out a successful EU presidency. Although Swartbol did not accompany Balkenende to Rome personally, he made clear that Balkenende had held substantial discussions with incoming European Commission President Barroso regarding the crisis over the new commission, and that they had been in "daily" contact since. Swartbol made clear that Balkenende was fighting to retain the competition portfolio for Neelie Kroes, but suggested that it would be hard to resist if Barroso appealed to the Dutch as EU President to support a compromise slate acceptable to the European Parliament. Balkenende and Barroso reportedly are having dinner together this week and will discuss the matter further. (Note: In a separate meeting with POLCOUNS, PM advisor Wepke Kingma also did not rule out the possibility that the Dutch might ultimately have no choice but to accept a modified portfolio for Kroes, especially if that would allow Barroso to present

a new Commission to the European Council meeting on November 5.)

SOBEL